



MORE DETAILS SURFACE ABOUT S-24, THE “RE-EDUCATION CAMP”

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Today's session in the trial of Kaing Guek Eav (alias Duch) closely resembled yesterday's proceedings in form and structure. In the morning session a witness was called to give her live testimony while the court continued its practice of reading into the record prior written testimonies of witnesses during the afternoon session.

“No one left to work hard for”

The morning began when the court called 64-year-old Bou Thon to the witness stand. As with several of the other witnesses, the President reminded her of her rights and obligations as a witness. Namely, she has the right to refuse to answer questions that would be self-incriminating and she has an obligation to tell the truth in her entire testimony.

Thon explained that she got married before 1975 and moved with her husband to Phnom Penh. However, when the Khmer Rouge captured the city her family decided to return to their home village. On their way back, they were stopped by Khmer Rouge soldiers and redirected to Phnom Penh where they could be put to work for the cause of the revolution. Her husband was initially assigned to be a driver of a fuel tanker while she cooked for him and staff at the Ministry of Energy where he was assigned. In 1977 Thon gave birth to a newborn baby in a hospital only to discover upon leaving that her husband had disappeared. Sadly, she never saw him alive again. She later discovered his picture at the Tuol Sleng prison (S-21) which confirmed her fears that he had indeed been executed.

During her testimony she mentioned that all of her children had died, leaving her all alone. This prompted the President to inquire about exactly how many children she had and how they died. Strangely, there was a lot of confusion over the basic and preliminary question of how many children she had. Some parts of her testimony seemed to suggest that she had 4 children while other parts seemed to suggest that she only had 3 children. The confusion was most likely a result of translation problems. While she had difficulty clearly expressing the number of children that she had and how they perished, the feeling of sadness and loneliness she was left with could *not* be expressed more clearly than the way it was on her face.

After the disappearance of her husband, she was moved to several different locations but spent the majority of her time at the S-24 facility. During her time there, she was put to work from morning to night with only two very short breaks. During her morning break she was able to see her newborn baby and breast-feed him. He spent the rest of his time with a nearby caretaker. She testified that while she did not witness anyone else being beaten, she herself had been physically abused at S-24. Furthermore, she testified that virtually every evening

some prisoners were selected to be moved to a new facility. None of those prisoners ever returned.

She remained at S-24 until the Vietnamese army captured Phnom Penh and all remaining personnel fled from S-24. As she explained, she “stupidly” followed the rest of the group, including Duch, instead of going back to her home village. She estimated that there were about 100 people on the run (including Duch) which she was able to determine because she had made “3 big bowls of rice.” She remarked that when they were on the run, Duch appeared to be a very normal man and a human being. It was then when someone pointed out to her that Duch had been in charge of S-21 and S-24. As she was recounting her flight from S-24, she seemed to have trouble holding back her emotions. She admitted that she did not immediately return home because she was “ashamed” that she had lost her husband and her children. While she eventually realized that there was nothing to be ashamed of, it was quite clear that she still holds on dearly to her memories. In perhaps the most powerful moment of the day, she explained how every time she goes out to the farm now she asks herself why she is doing so because she has “no one left to work hard for.”

The judges then turned the questioning over to the Civil Parties. This produced a short but noteworthy exchange. Thon was asked about a specific conversation she had with her husband before he disappeared where he reluctantly told her about things he had heard relating to arrests. He stressed that they needed to be careful about what they said and did. She then explained that her husband did not initially want to tell her what he knew because “women talk a lot.” This elicited a large amount of laughter from the gallery on an otherwise very somber day.

Toward the end of the questioning the Civil Party lawyer awkwardly asked her own witness whether she would feel guilty if she performed an evil act but was being forced to do it by someone else. It is hard to understand the purpose of the question. Thon was understandably thrown off and responded that she had never done anything evil because she is a good person so she could not answer that question. After another similar question, the President intervened to remind counsel that personal questions in the form of a hypothetical should be avoided because responses to such questions are imaginary.

Before Duch took his opportunity to make comments and observations, the defense counsel asked the witness whom she should really be angry with when there was a line of command and a hierarchy that people were forced to follow. The defense counsel seemed to suggest in his question that she could only be angry with one person and not multiple people. This might have confused her because she seemed to have trouble answering this question. In response, she stated that she cannot be angry at Pol Pot now because he is dead so she is relying on lawyers to find “justice,” but did not seem able to define the concept of “justice” for herself.

Next, Duch told the chamber that Thon’s testimony came from years of pain and suffering. At this point the Civil Party lawyer asked the chamber to end Duch’s response because it seemed to have a negative emotional impact on the witness. Even though Duch was apologizing, in a sense, it was bringing back very painful memories for the witness. The President allowed Duch to finish but asked that he not bring up specific things that would surely hurt the witness. Duch ended by stating that the Cambodian people should condemn him to the highest level of punishment. He continued to say that he shares the sorrow and the

suffering of Cambodians with the bottom of his heart and will accept the judgment from the tribunal by “legal and psychological means without objection.”

Additional written accounts of “life” at S-24

Just as it did yesterday, the chamber spent the second half of the day reading prior written testimony into evidence in lieu of oral testimony. Both statements that were entered into evidence this afternoon related to the treatment of prisoners in S-24

The first witness was Phach Siek, a woman who had voluntarily joined the revolution in 1972. She served in the army in different capacities until 1977 when she was arrested and put in prison at the Prey Sar re-education camp (S-24). She was given no reason for her arrest at the time but she later learned that her division commander had been arrested under suspicion of being a traitor and therefore most of his subordinates were viewed with suspicion as well. She explained that the S-24 camp was divided into several different units. She was segregated into a unit that contained only married women and/or elderly women. She was forced to work from 2:00 A.M until 12:00 when she would have a lunch break for 2 scoops of gruel. She then returned to work from 1:30 to 5:30 P.M., and often again until 10:00 P.M. She recalled how the food was insufficient but there was no way to complain because they could not move freely or speak freely to one another. She also noted that there was a special building where prisoners were beaten and another where they were administered electrical shocks for interrogation purposes. While she was told that S-21 was for those high commanders that betrayed the nation and S-24 was for subordinates, every night new prisoners were shipped from S-24 to S-21, never to be heard from again.

At the end of her testimony she gave a different account of fleeing S-24 during the Vietnamese invasion than did the witness Thon this morning. Siek stated that Duch ordered 35 people arrested when they were on the run and that number included Siek. Luckily Siek was one of 6 that he later released. Duch vehemently denied this account. He stated that Thon’s morning account was accurate. Other than that disagreement, he did not forcefully attack Siek’s testimony. On the contrary, he admitted that numerous points she made were accurate and true.

The second and final witness of the day was Kaing Pan who was also a former guard-turned-prisoner in the late 1970s. Pan worked long hours digging canals but was not beaten or tortured. Corroborating Siek’s testimony, Pan also witnessed many trucks arriving nightly to take prisoners to S-21. Pan also stated that screams and cries for help could be heard at S-21 during political training sessions. To conclude the day, Duch confirmed that Pan’s written statement was “true in principle.”